

Resignation from the International Bolshevik Tendency

I hereby resign from the International Bolshevik Tendency. I have considered this action carefully and have concluded that it is no longer possible for me to remain under the discipline of the organization.

Our organization was guilty of abstentionism towards the solidarity demonstrations occurring throughout the city following the G20 Summit. This came on the heels of our cowardly performance on Saturday 6/26/10 at which we failed to distinguish ourselves from the trade union bureaucrats by passively standing by as they worked with the police to isolate the more militant activists committed to confronting the security fence. Contrary to the leadership's hyper-cautious approach, it was an acceptable risk to participate in the solidarity demonstrations and at past protests we did not automatically flee when police started using repression against protesters. Nearly all the Left groups and trade union bureaucrats marched around mindlessly in a circle and then went running to their homes Saturday afternoon when the police attacked our basic bourgeois democratic rights. As a result the best and brightest youth suffered with little to no tactical or political support and were needlessly isolated. A smart and full engagement by our organization could have created real opportunities for us in the future to win over activists and youth to the banner of socialist revolution. Instead, by abstaining, we damaged our reputation in the eyes of the very people we need to win over to build a revolutionary party.

Contrary to the contentions of other comrades, there was never supposed to be a police line at Queen Street and when the TU march reached the intersection at Spadina Avenue. Comrades later noted that they saw individuals trying to pass by the line, as well as a commotion and several people screaming to not return to Queen's Park, but instead to remain at the line. Despite being near the head of the march, under Tom Riley's tactical leadership we failed to utter so much as a peep of protest against the TU bureaucrats' immediate retreat. We were in a valuable strategic position that may have allowed us to agitate amongst the crowd, and encourage people to stay at the intersection and tie up the bulk of the riot police while the full 25,000 people streamed by us. Our contingent would not have been exposed as we filtered out the good from the bad and established a contingent at the police line that could have pushed the line or joined the breakaway protest as we did in Quebec City in 2001. In our local meeting before the protests it was acknowledged that we would be facing such a decision and were supposed to prepare for it. We did nothing but obediently follow the TU bureaucrats and as a result the breakaway march went it alone and was more vulnerable to identification and arrest upon reaching Queen's Park where many, including us, had already dispersed.

Our chant "2, 4, 6, 8, We don't want a police state" was taken up by many protesters, the bourgeois press reported this, and in protests later that week it had made it onto the chant sheets that were distributed to all protesters by liberal organizers. This, along with the general notion that many wanted to march south of Queen Street, indicates that it was not unreasonable to argue we may have influenced many to form a sizable contingent capable of playing a role in the more militant demonstrations, and assisted our comrades elsewhere.

In response to Canadian Labour Congress President Ken Georgetti's pro-police letter condemning 'vandals' who left their march, about 250 officials, stewards, retirees, and rank and file activists published their own letter condemning Georgetti. They stated that after, "the 'Peoples First' march, many of us remained on the streets throughout the weekend contesting the unprecedented militarization of our city and the G20 neoliberal agenda." Sadly, in this particular instance, the IBT is not in this

camp, but rather, that of Georgetti. They note that, "thousands mobilized in front of police headquarters on June 28th in solidarity with the hundreds of activists still being detained and our unions and union flags were absent." Of course, as our comrades well know, our placards were also absent. Even the overtly opportunist *Socialist Action* (Usec) displayed their banner. The union members' retaliatory letter ends with a concluding statement that the IBT comrades should take to heart, "we will not and cannot win the struggle we face against the violent onslaught of neoliberalism by abandoning our allies and our communities in the wake of a massive crackdown on dissent." That is exactly what Georgetti and the IBT have done and the refusal to acknowledge this error speaks volumes about our organization.

Several groups ranging from Anarchist to Maoist to the liberal NOII had publicly called for all to breakaway from the TU march and confront the fence which our IEC were well aware of. After testing the line in several places as we marched west on Queen Street and upon the bulk of the TU march reaching the intersection, the breakaway demonstration doubled back down Queen Street where there were less riot police and cut a path close to the fence before circling back to Queens Park. We contributed to their isolation by not doing our job of exposing TU bureaucrat betrayal and the riot police were able to close in on them as they reached the park. At the time I was severely disappointed as we marched up Spadina Avenue away from the best militants, but followed my leaders due to misplaced confidence in their experience and skill, despite their approach being, as our most senior comrade, HK, later described, as "conservative to the extreme." However, I no longer will be making that mistake again. The continued abstention throughout the following week further deepened my dismay.

On my own personal initiative I and other activists spent Tuesday 6/29/10 supplying political prisoners with food and drink as they were released on bail. None of the Toronto left groups were there. Later the next day I learned via email that our main international leader Tom Riley spent that evening playing baseball with conservative gentlemen that were quite upset about how the police brutally trounced on civil rights, wanted to talk politics and had been phoning politicians. While this was taken as a reminder that "almost anything is possible", it still did not dawn on him to leave the baseball game and join me to help those continuing to suffer under such repression. While comrades are entitled to their personal time, this sort of charge has been used against others inside and outside the group and therefore Riley should be held to his own standards.

Our characterization of the breakaway protesters was aimed at discrediting them by writing them off as powerless youth looking for a quick solution and undertaking isolated, individualist acts of brainless symbolic violence. I think this is satisfying to our leadership because it excuses their own abstention. I think our group is all too content with sitting at home regurgitating "For Grynspan" for its seemingly Trotskyist orthodoxy regardless of whether it has any bearing on the tactics used. These protesters hurt nobody while Grynspan shot a man dead. Equating the breakaway protest with 'left-wing-terrorism' by any stretch was dangerous, stupid and should have never happened. While this kind of direct action protest is insufficient to "pave the way" to revolution on its own, it does work to a limited extent in popularizing a subjectively revolutionary perspective for many young people. I do not think that any of the breakaway protesters thought that smashing some bank windows and torching cop cars was going to create an overthrow of capitalism nor was it done because it was emotionally satisfying. Rather, I think that those youth did what they felt was necessary at the time, however poorly conceived, despite being terrified throughout the ordeal. Our leadership's failure to recognize this is endemic of a larger problem.

At every step of the way the immediate impulse by leading members of the group was to write off any potential gains that would be had by intervening vigorously in the Toronto G20 demonstrations and

merely retreat to the safety of home.

Our silent and quick retreat Saturday and subsequent abstention is in stark contrast with our performance at the April 2001 FTAA summit in Quebec City during which we fully engaged with the breakaway protest that confronted the fence and stood shoulder to shoulder with those young militants as an incredible barrage of gas was fired on the crowd. At the time we denounced the Trade Union tops and media who “by playing up distinctions between the 'violent' protesters at the fence and the far more numerous 'peaceful' ones in the official march, the media sought to marginalize the young radicals who stood up to the cops.” [1] This time we found ourselves dutifully following the bureaucrats and internally scorning the breakaways as childish adventurers bent on mindless violence. One must therefore begin to draw the conclusion that our group has suffered significant degeneration during the decade or so since.

When I raised these serious criticisms, all but our comrade in Ireland immediately and mindlessly lined up behind our leadership before even addressing my points. A variety of personal slanders was used to discredit my opinion and I was shocked at how the overwhelming majority of our group could only view dissent as anger and hostility toward our dear leader Tom Riley. Any attempt to sympathize with my perspective was hedged in the conception that I was childishly fetishizing arrest and confrontation with the police despite making it clear that I was doing no such thing. Such unhealthy internal life confirmed my worst suspicions about our organization.

I formally joined the IBT in the spring of 2009 after being a sympathizer working with the group for two years in Toronto. The high level of programmatic education earned my confidence and respect despite the small size of the group relative to others. However, when the resignation of Sam Trachtenberg [2] in New York came to light I took some time to investigate his case and delayed applying for full-time membership. The political criticisms raised by Sam. were never explained to me. Instead, damning personal attacks were made against his credibility. Personal health issues were ruthlessly exploited and distorted in order to discredit him and avoid articulating any of his criticisms. Unable to recognize these attacks for what they were, I submitted my application and after being accepted, I brought up the fact that I had taken a good look at Sam's case before finalizing my decision to join. I was told he was paranoid and delusional, and that it was a good thing he left so the leadership didn't have to work even harder to push him out. I regret that I did not contact Sam, at the time to get his side of the split but in my defense, my personal ties to the younger comrades in the TBT local influenced me to leave the issue in the past though I kept my suspicions in the back of my mind for a day when more information would come to light.

At a 15 April 2010 local meeting it was suggested that a comrade who roughly fit my own description in terms of my limited relationship with Sam “befriend” him on a social media site in order to monitor him and relay information back to the leadership. I was the only person to comment on that point, stating that I would be the best candidate for such a job but that I don't feel comfortable with it; that it felt dishonest and wrong. Riley merely shrugged and dismissed my objections by saying it wasn't so bad and I shouldn't have a problem with it. This was another weird side of the organization to which I responded with dismay. Could Samuel Trachtenberg be accurately describing the internal workings of my group? The validity of his case had grown with time and now a concrete example of unhealthy leadership practices had been demonstrated to me. I must now conclude that a disgusting campaign of lies and slander was used against Sam in order to push him out after he made various correct criticisms of the leadership. I now agree with Sam's criticisms and urge comrades to look at them with open eyes.

As everyone in the IBT knows, membership has continued to decline since Sam in New York left the

group. The dropping off of long-time supporters such as L. in NYC and the dismissal of W.'s attempt to transfer to our local was merely brushed aside because they were “old” and “useless.” An appropriate political explanation was not given. Our London local is constantly trashed for various reasons that seem unfair to me. More recently it has been announced that we should expect the “likely” loss of A. in Ireland who is a long-time comrade of the group and probably one of our most energetic members in terms of adapting to tactical realities and functioning with keen initiative. I recognized at the time that it was no accident that yet another of our most energetic, engaging and least abstentionist comrades who was working outside of the direct supervision of either Riley or Logan had become a target for being pushed out. The only value this comrade had according to our local and international leader was that he is one of our few comrades who can maintain the website, hence, he will be kept around as long as is convenient. It is also no coincidence that he was my only supporter when I raised my criticisms.

After recruiting a couple members in recent years, in large part due to the interventions of their youngest comrades, the TBT local is now shrinking back down in size and everywhere else our membership continues to contract under the burden of a bureaucratic leadership. Contact sessions have consistently broken down after initially showing promise and there seems to be little expectation of winning over Toronto leftists to the group in the foreseeable future. Our performance during the G20 protests has only made our prospects worse.

Some time ago, when it was indicated that the fusion talks with a group of contacts in Latin America were probably not going to work out because the contacts had demanded we do what our leadership described as “OCAP-type entry work” I was unsure if this was inevitable. As a rank and file member of the IBT I was never privy to any discussions with these comrades and news of our progress with them only came from our senior leaders who constantly portrayed them less as dedicated revolutionaries, and more as naïve children with silly ideas floating around in their heads, despite the fact that they were working under much harsher conditions than us. This is an even more bureaucratic repeat of the way our leadership botched similar fusion talks in the past.

It is amazing how much the 9/5/81 resignation letter to the Spartacist League by HK [3], our most senior comrade, applies to our situation

“For about a year I have been moving toward the conclusion that distortions in the leadership of sections, locals, and fractions have developed and matured--at least in part from an internal life characterized by a defensive, hierarchical regime combined with a personalistic, Jesuitical method of internal argument and discussion. This process is advanced to the point where the S.L./S.Y.L. membership is increasingly composed of “true believers” or cynics. I suspect that the incidents of political and tactical incompetence in the S.L. are connected with this deterioration of internal life. I think the central leadership has consciously and cynically concluded that the membership of the S.L. is too weak politically and personally to allow even the slightest disagreement with the leadership. There is an implied arithmetical equation: disagreement with the leadership equals hostility to the leadership equals disloyalty equals betrayal. Carried further, these trends will see the S.L. come to resemble less a principled, proletarian combat organization than a theocratic, hierarchical, political cult.”

When internal critics struggling to give criticism in order to better build the organization are branded as traitors and apolitical slanders are used to discredit them, honest revolutionaries cannot continue to remain silent.

There is an obvious pattern of degeneration present in the tradition of Jim Robertson's brand of

Trotskyism that we stand in. After abortion rights in Pennsylvania were restricted by Governor George Casey amidst the presidential elections of 1992, New York's *Village Voice* newspaper gave Casey a platform to explain how a liberal can be anti-abortion. About one hundred angry protesters, including the now defunct New York Bolshevik Tendency, confronted Casey in order to disrupt his reactionary diatribe and draw attention to the legal lynching of political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal who continues to sit on death row in Pennsylvania. The IBT wrote the Spartacist League a letter criticizing them for sending a sales team to sell at the door for half an hour before leaving, without ever entering the building. The protest successfully called attention to Mumia's case and stole the spotlight from Casey. Our letter asked the SL "how could you have passed up such a perfect opportunity to demonstrate in action the politics you profess on paper?" to which we provided our own explanation:

"We have noted in the past that the SL's autocratic internal regime has created organization 'permeated with servility at one pole and authoritarianism at the other,' (as Harry Turner characterized Gerry Healy's organization in 1966). Such organizations produce people accustomed to operating according to a script, in situations where all the variables can be controlled. When they venture into the big world, where events can sometimes take an unexpected turn, the limitations of such training are thrown in sharp relief. Did you shun the protest against Casey for fear of participating in an action you could not fully control? Or perhaps because the presence of other left groups would have prevented the Spartacist League from claiming exclusive credit? And does *Workers Vanguard* ignore the events of October 2 out of embarrassment over this shameful abstentionism? [4]

Considering this in light of our performance during the Toronto G20 protests, one has to wonder how we can also find ourselves at the end of such charges.

During the CUNY student protests of 1995-7 [5], another symptom of organizational degeneration was demonstrated by the Spartacist League in a tactical betrayal of working-class youths on 23 March 1995. Roughly 15,000 students of all ages, including our NYC branch, demonstrated in front of City Hall and suffered mass arrests and high volume pepper spray to prevent them from then marching to Wall Street. As the confrontation rapidly heightened and the predominantly black and working class students began staging a mass sit in inside City Hall Park, the Spartacist League's sales team quickly packed up their lit table and fled. This cowardly flinch was widely noted and commented on amongst CUNY's student activists, ruining the SL's reputation for years to come.

The "staid Marxists" of the Spartacist League forced us to address their "Politics of Chicken" yet another time [6] when they abstained from the 1984 anti-Moral Majority protests in the Bay Area;

"We will explain that, fearful of state repression, you were too cowardly to join the thousand or more anti-Falwell protesters; that we are the ones who put forward the Trotskyist program to those who had assembled to oppose this sinister rise of the reactionary "Moral Majority."

If history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce, then what do we say about the third and fourth time? At minimum there is an unhealthy pattern occurring that stretches back through the IBT and into the SL. Lifelong permanent leaders grow to dominate the organizations they create which they take down with them. This is a problem that cannot simply be remedied by creating a new copy of the old group.

Sadly, our own outgrowth from Robertson's school of party building has followed the same path as each subsequent challenger to Riley and Logan's leadership fell away over the past decades. While

Robertson had his style, his protégées carry on the tradition of manipulation and maneuvering in their own personal style of “informal sanctions” and behind the scenes maneuvers against opponents to retain control of the group. While Robertson's group managed to partially break out of their marginalization in the early 1970s, our own group has not and almost 3 decades later our publications have been plagued with the same sort of publication infrequency and delay found in the early years of the Spartacist League as the leadership control and monopoly of even the most minor detail of organizational life has suffocated and stifled the ability of new comrades to learn and develop.

It is far past due for every honest comrade to speak out against the organizational degeneration inside the International Bolshevik Tendency. I hope I will not be the last to do so.

-Brandon Gray

[1] ***FTAA Demonstration in Quebec: For Socialist Globalization!***; 1917 No. 24, 2002

http://www.bolshevik.org/1917/no24/socialist_globalization.html

[2] ***The Road Out of Rileyville***; 9/25/08

http://www.regroupment.org/main/page_resignation_letter.html

[3] Resignation from the Spartacist League

http://www.regroupment.org/main/page_hkres.html

[4] ***A Letter WV Didn't Print***; by Jim Cullen 11/02/92

<http://www.bolshevik.org/Leaflets/WV%20letter%201992.html>

[5] IBT CUNY Documents 1995-1997

http://www.regroupment.org/main/page_cuny_documents.html

[6] ***ET Protests Moral Majority—SL Abstains: A Case of Mistaken Identity***, *ET Bulletin* #4, May 1985

<http://www.bolshevik.org/ETB/ETB4/ETB4.htm#Identity>